



ST. EDMUND'S

THE STORY OF AN ENGLISH CHURCH

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The intention behind this booklet is to give the reader an insight into the history of St. Edmund's. What is presented here must not be regarded as a complete and thorough presentation. I only hope people through this work become a bit more conscious of the church's past, and how the church and parish have gone through phases and changes over the decades. Much of what is written here rests upon the late T. K. Derry's *A History of St. Edmund's Church Oslo 1884-1984*, a work which I haven't had the slightest intention nor the ambition to replace. If anyone feels inclined to expand their knowledge of the church history after having read my humble work, I recommend Derry's piece of real scholarship.

The initial idea for this book was to write some sort of a people's history, with anecdotes and amusing stories from times past. I am most grateful to all who have been my sources and in other ways have shown interest throughout the working progress. Special thanks to David Lovett and Laura Arlov for translating my text to English, and carrying out the layout process.

Trond Werner Pettersen

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The name chosen for the Anglican Church in Oslo makes it impossible to evade a couple of fundamental questions: Who was St Edmund and why was the church named after him? In order to answer these questions we have to delve deep into history.

The Edmund we are talking about, and the one referred to in history books as Edmund the Martyr, was King of East Anglia (the eastern part of England) in the middle of the 9th century. He was killed in brutal fashion at Hoxne in the county of Suffolk when Danish Vikings invaded England in the autumn of 869. According to legend he was first bound to a tree and then pierced with a shower of arrows. Together with St George, St Edmund is one of England's most illustrious saints and may justifiably be called England's national hero number two.

Dedicating the Anglican Church in Christiania (Oslo) to this martyr and saint was not only an act of homage to one of England's most famous saints. It had just as much to do with the reinforcing of former bonds between the British Isles and Norway – a connection that over the ages had been considered fundamental for Norway, as well as highly instrumental in bringing Christianity to the country.

The name Edmund links our church of today directly to Norway's ecclesiastical past – with history in general, and Oslo's history in particular. Around the year 1150 a group of Cistercian monks from what is now Lincolnshire founded a monastery on Hovedøya, an island in the Oslo Fjord, the ruins of which can be visited to this day. The monastery was dedicated jointly to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Martyr Edmund. Hovedøya, along with all the other monasteries in Norway, was dissolved during the Reformation at the beginning of the 16th century.

INDUSTRIALISATION AND DISSENTION

For centuries Norway's economy has been based on exports and oriented in no small degree towards Great Britain. Since the end of the Middle Ages, vast quantities of timber have been exported from Norway which, in turn, had become dependent on the import of corn. These trading links had for example led to the building as far back as 1696 of a Dano-Norwegian Church in London, and the erecting of English churches in both Danish Helsingør and Swedish Gothenburg.

The establishment of an English-language, Anglican church in Christiania (Oslo) should be seen in connection with one overriding phenomenon: Industrialisation. By this we mean the interplay between the dawning industrialisation of Norway and the role played by the importation of British technology, expertise and manpower. The first Anglicans formed





a congregation at a copper works in Alta as long ago as 1842, presumably on an improvised and informal basis. This was three years before any Christian religious societies outside the Church of Norway could contemplate formation. It was only with the so-called Dissenter Law in 1845 that full freedom for the establishment of free churches was granted. The single most important industrial-related event affecting English/Anglo-Saxon influence and immigration was undoubtedly the building of Norway's first railway line between Christiania and Eidsvoll during the period 1851-1854. Suffice to say that in a 1908 obituary for its oldest member, the St. Edmund's congregation stress the fact that he was the engine driver of the first steam locomotive in Norway!

It is hard to determine how many Britons were living in Norway's capital city when the railways and other industrial projects took shape, but an estimate from 1864 mentions 86 adults. Fourteen years later, according to the British Consulate, there were 200 British citizens in the city. In view of the fecundity of the average Victorian family, these figures would seem to tally. For the record, this expatriate group of Britons came from all walks of life, from factory workers and railwaymen to language teachers and diplomats.

Storytellers and historians often go astray in a plethora of names, figures and dates, but when studying the establishment of the English Church in Christiania, one name in particular stands out among the rest: Thomas Bennett. Mr Bennett came to Norway as an English teacher and secretary to the former British Vice Consul in Hammerfest John Rice Crowe. It is uncertain whether Thomas Bennett was the first to arrange religious meetings among Britons living in Christiania, but he was certainly the person who in 1852 took the step of having them formalised by the British Consulate. Seven years previously the above-mentioned Dissenter Law had cleared the way by allowing denominations other than the established Norwegian Lutheran state church. The founding of an Anglican church in Christiania showed similarities to both Stockholm and Copenhagen where work was in progress to erect Anglican church buildings.

In the absence of an actual church building, the Anglicans in the first decades held their services in a hotel located in the Treschow Building, formerly owned by the Christiania Cathedral School, near the Oslo Stock Exchange. The building still stands to this day (2009). When the new university building on Karl Johans gate was completed around 1860, permission was granted for the new assembly hall – today called Gamle Festsal – to be used for this purpose. However, the dream of eventually having one's own House of God was ever present. In 1874, the Revd S B Crowther-Beynon made the following statement about a congregation without its own church building: "The English Church is not built only for the British residents now in the country, but for English-speaking Christians to worship in till they reach the "Temple made without hands." Besides expressing a desire to have one's own church, the Revd. Crowther-



Beynon makes an interesting observation about one very important feature of the Anglican church that was, and still is, highly relevant: St Edmund's functions as a church not only for Britons and confessing Anglicans, but also for English-speaking Christians in general.

A CHURCH BUILDING OF ONE'S OWN

One important milestone in the history of St Edmund's Church is the year 1881. That was the year when Thomas Michell became British Consul General in Norway. Mr Michell would not accept that the Anglican congregation might have to continue more or less as a private family enterprise, almost as an inheritance from the Crowe family, and it was Thomas Michell who established formal bodies for administering the congregation. The various reforms he initiated, such as the introduction of an Annual General Meeting and the drawing up of formal Statutes, helped transform the congregation into an ecclesiastical entity. That is the reason why it is correct to reckon 1881 as the foundation year of the Anglican Church in Christiania (as can be seen on a web site covering ecclesiastical architecture in Norway). In terms of religion it was highly significant that the ties between the Christiania congregation and the Church of England were clarified and laid down in formal rules – future chaplains would have to be licensed by the Bishop of London.

Around 1880, for unknown reasons, the congregation ceased to hold services at the University. In March 1883 they reconvened in a mission house (demolished during the 1960s) situated on Akersgata. Considering the disruption caused by the move, the lengthy interval and doubtless the feeling of being made hostages to fortune, it would hardly have been surprising if the wish to have one's own church had not become stronger and efforts to achieve this end had intensified. This is, in fact, what actually happened.

In March 1882 the building project was formally ratified at the Annual General Meeting and put into effect. The first fourteen donors each signed up for a total of Nkr. 8,575-, a figure that doubled in the course of two years thanks to voluntary contributions. In view of the emphasis on the fact that "the proposed building would be an ornament to the town," it was assumed, or should one say hoped, that the city would provide the building site. This was not the case, however, and the building committee had to face the fact that they had the authority to buy a plot of land, but not the necessary means. Having evaluated other and more expensive sites, the decision to acquire the plot in Møllergata was almost certainly taken because it was the cheapest. Thomas Michell primarily wanted a site at present-day Grev Wedels plass (Gamle Logen) so that the church could be sited in a more open location between Akershus Fortress and the fjord. Furthermore, the area in which the church was to be built was not particularly attractive. Hammersborg at that time was regarded as virtually a slum district, and the choice of site would mean shelving any ideas about





future enlargement. Nevertheless, when St Edmund's was being built, plans were already afoot for major urban renewal in the area. Twenty or so years earlier, the city's most prominent church, Holy Trinity Church, had been built on a nearby hill, and a new City Hall was planned on a site where the Oslo Public Library, dating from the inter-war years, is situated today.

At half-past one on Thursday 8th November 1883 the foundation stone was laid in the presence of a large assembly of people, which incidentally comprised over a quarter of the Norwegian Cabinet, in addition to the British Consul and representatives of the Church of England and the Church of Norway. In his speech, Thomas Michell made special mention of the historical Anglo-Norwegian ecclesiastical links stretching back to the founding of the monastery on Hovedøya:

"Only ruins of that large and beautifully situated monastery now remain, and many Englishmen, and many a member of the daughter Church in America, visiting that interesting spot must have pondered over those silent records of the distant past and wondered how it was that no Anglican Church could now be found in Norway."

BUILDING THE NEW CHURCH

The new church building was designed by the firm of Due & Steckmest. Paul Due, one of the foremost Norwegian architects of the nineteenth century, had considerable international experience and was engaged in many of the major construction projects of the day. He chose neo-Gothic as the most appropriate style for the English church and redbrick as the most suitable material, completely in line with several of the capital's churches from the same period. One major obstacle was the financing of the project. All the churches that Architect Due had designed before had an average cost of approximately 200,000 kroner; this time Due & Steckmest had to keep within a far tighter budget of under a tenth of this sum – 15,000 kroner – of which 3,000 was for the foundations alone!

Another problem was the constant stream of orders for them to make changes – and matters were not improved by the need to have the church ready by the spring of 1884. In addition to this, the harried architects had to provide the church with a spire and also room for 200 people – fifty more than originally planned. The solution was a side aisle on the east. An eastwards extension was planned but never realised. It must be mentioned, incidentally, that a period of financial problems followed in the wake of the building project.

Mr Due was an effective organiser, however, and the first service in the new church was celebrated on 29th June 1884. Arthur Frederick Heaton emphasised the pleasure of having the longed-for church finished and described it as something that would bring pleasure to all English speakers, whether they were residents or visitors. The following year, in September 1885, the church received its first royal guest when the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) attended Sunday service together with some of the



Paul Due

crew from the royal yacht *Osborne*. According to contemporary sources he was “entirely satisfied with everything, from the church building to the selection of hymns.”

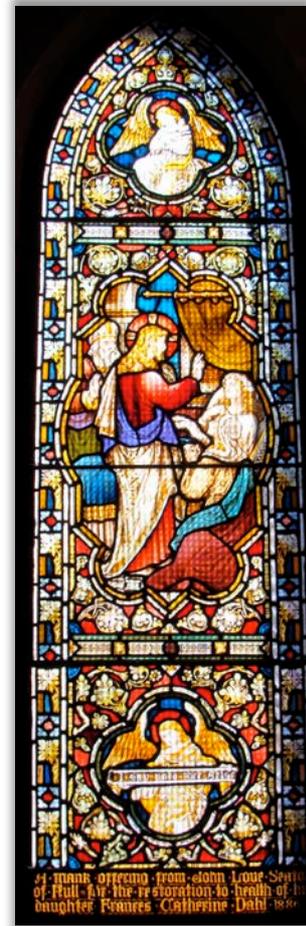
In a retrospective view penned in 1954, one of the more senior churchgoers described how the church, the congregation and the entire English colony in Oslo, had altered during the past sixty years. Great changes had taken place both within and outside the church, which “in its original simplicity resembled more a barn with walls interspersed by several stained-glass windows.” There was a font and altar, where the “altar silver” comprised two glass vases! But there was neither pulpit, lectern nor prayer desk, and only a rather wheezy harmonium serving as an organ. Yet despite the lack of interior facilities, the church was beautifully decorated for the Christmas carol services and was filled with holly specially sent or brought over from Britain.

As horse-drawn trams were the sole means of public transport before the advent of electric trams and buses, getting to church could be quite strenuous at times. Interestingly enough, our British observer emphasises that these early conveyances did not have conductors. “There were horse-drawn taxis, or more correctly sledges in the winter, but it was not always possible to get hold of one. I have vivid recollections of wading through Slottsparken in deep snow – very heavy – but no one seemed any the worse and it did not keep people from the church.” In other words, loyalty and faithfulness were prominent features even then. The feeling of belonging to the church was indeed very strong. This would be even more apparent in later years when the congregation faced difficult economic times in the new century.

TURN OF THE CENTURY

In the years after the foundation of St Edmund’s, and as the nineteenth century drew to a close, the congregation and the English community in Christiania underwent some changes. It was partly to do with a generation change and partly a transformation of the entire nature of the congregation. During a period of ten years the congregation lost nearly all the men who had spearheaded the erection of the church building. At the same time it became clear that the congregation was now dominated to a far lesser degree by influential English Anglicans, due to an increase in the number of English speakers from other countries, denominations and faiths that began to form quite a significant group. The English language continued to form a link across national borders.

Just at that time the church held a special attraction for one particular group of Norwegian churchgoers. The magnet that drew them to St Edmund’s was the desire to learn English, or at least gain a rudimentary knowledge of the language. Tradition tells us that they used to occupy the long bench in the side aisle. The group in question was made up of potential Norwegian emigrants. Thus St Edmund’s played a very important





role in more recent Norwegian history. It is worth reflecting over the small but significant differences between Norwegian and English ecclesiastical traditions that came to light in this particular instance. The Norwegians, having grown up in the Lutheran tradition, were reluctant to kneel in the pews and were reported to have “a negative attitude towards the collection.” The former can however be seen as the result of an inherited custom. As regards the latter, it can hardly come as any surprise that these emigrants were not generous financial contributors. It was after all primarily economic grounds that were forcing many of them to emigrate, and most of them had had to scrimp and save for several years in order to pay for the trans-Atlantic ticket to the United States of America. They were so numerous in the church’s earliest years, the influx almost caused overcrowding.

LONG-SERVING PARISH PRIEST

One significant event in that century’s last decade was the appointment of George Elderkin Mooney as resident incumbent in 1894. Revd Mooney was to remain in this position until his death in 1935 – a total of 41 years of service, which is still an unbroken record. Thanks to him and his wife the church choir gained a new lease of life. The church recruited its first choirmaster in 1890; but it was said that the most noticeable thing about the choir was the increase in heating costs due to the weekly choir practices! Revd Mooney often emphasised the importance of the choir’s contribution to the devotional services and ensured that part of a fund established in memory of Thomas Michell went towards the acquisition of the church’s first organ in 1901. All in all, Revd Mooney initiated several interesting reforms and variations of the form of service.

The dissolution of the Union between Norway and Sweden in 1905 affected the Anglican Church and its congregation in rather a special way; Norway’s new English-born Queen Maud (1869-1938) was from the outset an active supporter of the church and a regular worshipper. To this day St Edmund’s boasts several mementos given by, and commemorating, Queen Maud; not least in the form of the brass altar cross and candlesticks presented to the church on the occasion of the coronation in Trondheim in 1906. Other items are the epitaph for King Edward VII, the queen’s father, and the small head of Christ in the side aisle given in memory of her mother Queen Alexandra and her sister Princess Victoria.

WORLD WAR I AND THE INTER-WAR YEARS

Even though the British colony in the capital city of neutral Norway may have felt a little uncomfortable due to its obvious association with one of the warring factions, the First World War 1914-1918 proved inconsequential and caused little disturbance. Norway however was generally sympathetic to the allied cause. According to available sources,

not even British pressure for Norway to support their trade blockade against Germany led to any friction.

The immediate post-war years were difficult times for Norway as for the rest of Europe, and the 1920s would in turn bring several economic crises. St Edmund's was not unaffected by the post-war depression. A relentless fall in the value of the krone throughout the entire decade made it ever more difficult to make ends meet. In the bishop's visitation book from 1932 we can read the bold statement: "Oslo was not an easy parish to administer!"

The inter-war years brought other ways of life contrasting strongly to former times. One interesting example of this was the decrease in the annual summer visitors, who previously featured regularly in the annals of the church. Changes in holiday habits and more flexible travel opportunities also resulted in a decrease in the number of resident summer guests with links to the church. However, this could also have been a symptom of the changes within the British colony in Oslo.

Even if the life of the church and congregation altered in character, the aim however was the same as in 1884; St Edmund's was to be a meeting place for all English-speaking Christians. The economic situation which the church shared with the rest of society led, however, to withdrawal and a more introverted attitude. This also helps to explain the paradox that St Edmund's, despite the intention expressed above, on the whole had little or no contact with church life in Great Britain or the United States. Yet the occasions when St Edmund's came into contact with international church affairs, if one can use such a phrase, were none the less important and interesting. According to available sources, the only time the church came into contact with the well-known British ecclesiastical reform movement "The Oxford Movement" was in 1934, when there was some discussion about having a clerical representative for the movement to help solve some difficulty in holding a Christmas service. The ecclesiastical administration, and not least the contact between the seventy parishes in Central and North Europe and the mother church in Britain, became consolidated and clarified.

Central and northern Europe were formed into one diocese with its seat in London. The Bishopric of Gibraltar, which was established in 1842, functioned as overriding authority, although this applied mainly to the Mediterranean area.

CELEBRATING THE HALF-CENTURY!

In 1934 St. Edmund's Church celebrated its 50th anniversary. On the occasion of this jubilee, the chairman of the church council couldn't help emphasising that the congregation in general, and perhaps Revd Mooney in particular, "had helped ensure that new churchgoers always found a welcome at St Edmund's where one immediately felt oneself to be among friends." A compliment that, in his opinion, unfortunately could not be



applied to all Anglican congregations outside Great Britain. At the same time, he could also quote one particular visitor from abroad who maintained that the congregation in Oslo was “one of the happiest he had encountered outside of England.”

Even though the congregation was a happy one, austerity was the hallmark of the church in the inter-war years – as it was of society in general. In retrospect the inter-war years could be seen as a time of depression. The number of churchgoers sank. The choir, regarded by many as a classic trait and essential part of any English church, finally lost all its male singers. Financially it was barely possible to make ends meet and the 1930s seem to have been one long downturn. In 1938 the first confirmation in seven years was held – and this was with only one candidate!



*Appearance of the nave
around 1950.*

WORLD WAR II

We have come to regard the Second World War, whether we choose 1939 or 1940 as the starting point, as the great divide in the 20th century. With regard to St Edmund's it is debatable whether George Mooney's or Queen Maud's death, in 1935 and 1938 respectively, was the more significant. With their deaths the congregation lost two of its perhaps foremost figureheads. Each in their own way were important – one as dynamic leading figure and influential cleric; the other as pillar of the congregation and symbol of the good relations between Great Britain and Norway, as well as between Britons and Norwegians.

With the war, or perhaps more correctly the ensuing peace and post-war period, came a new era with renewed contacts between Great Britain and Norway – and with it a new phase in the life of the church. St Edmund's was also affected by the occupation, as was most of Norway, Europe and the rest of the world. The memorial plaque commemorating Queen Maud was unveiled in the church during Evensong on 21st January

1940. Less than four months later the coffin of the most British of all Norwegians, and friend of St Edmund's was secretly removed from Akershus Fortress for fear of possible desecration.

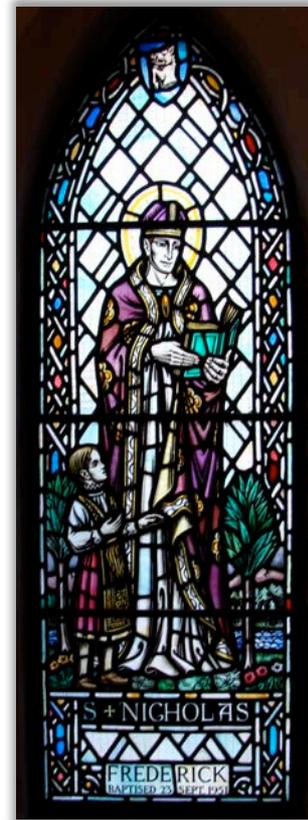
The Second World War was a five-year period during which the church was closed and all parochial work came to a virtual standstill. The chaplain, George H Thompson, went off to serve in India. Following the departure of the Norwegian king and government, most of the "official" members of the congregation who were associated with the Diplomatic Corps and similar institutions, left the country. But even though the church was closed for services, the congregation, or what was left of it, was not disbanded. The central figure throughout the war years was Mrs Clara Mooney. Her apartment in Niels Juels gate 45 became a focal point during those five years and was a fine example of the church not being reliant on "the Temple made by hands". Even though the church had closed, it carried on regardless.

NEW RESOURCES AND CULTURAL CLASHES

In this particular context, the so-called Post-war Era does not comprise one single, open-ended historical period. In gathering information about this epoch we need no longer solely rely on existing sources or, in order to be even more accurate, refer back to what has already been written about our church. However, it has been brought to the attention of the author that we have a rich collection of anecdotes as well as stories, memories and personal recollections at our disposal.

Taking the post-war period as a whole, we could justifiably claim that the Second World War laid the foundations for a new epoch at St Edmund's; just as the Revd George Mooney's and Queen Maud's departure a decade earlier had concluded another. An old adage about love and war could easily stand as the chapter heading here, because the keyword in this connection is to be found in the so-called "war brides." The war brought together people from various countries and, once peace was restored, many found themselves in a new home country or, to be more accurate, had gained a new homeland. Other alliances such as those within the field of defence policy were also created during the post-war years – and St Edmund's was affected by both.

The first service at St Edmund's after the liberation on 8th May was held a mere thirteen days later – on 21st May. The congregation, which mainly comprised military personnel, functioned more or less as a garrison church for allied troops for the rest of the year. The Revd Harald J Kerridge did not arrive to take up the post of parish priest until late summer 1946. Mr Kerridge provided invaluable support to the many recently formed romantic attachments in these austere and difficult times. It was symptomatic of the situation in those days that much of his time was spent holding services for young Anglo-Norwegian families in the many towns around the Oslo Fjord. The post-war period was a time of



reconstruction for St. Edmund's, as it was for Norwegian society in general. In retrospect this can be described as an alliance-building period – both in the form of romantic links and defence pacts. The former have already been described. The defence alliances refer to NATO's Northern Command, established in Oslo in 1951, and the headquarters relocated at Kolsås, Bærum, in 1954.

Members of the Ladies Guild in the early 90s are (from left): Joe Wiedeberg, Dorothy Borch-Nielsen, Joan Rodahl, Julian Elliott, Margaret Nilsen, Vicky Norman, Peggy Hange, Margaret Wold.



Many people say that one of the things they remember best from Sunday School or RI lessons is the sentence about the “church” not being just bricks and mortar but comprising people of flesh and blood. Who were those people who came from abroad to become domiciled in a new and very different country, and how did they fare? In her memoirs, one of the many war brides relates that the first and most fascinating sight on the quayside of a small coastal town was that of a small boy in characteristic and totally foreign “plus fours” – knee-length trousers with Selbu-patterned woollen socks. “I said to myself, I will never allow my son to go around looking like that – but eventually he did!” Many others said how funny it seemed at that time to see Norwegians wearing plus fours not only for country walks but also as everyday apparel around town. One lady can still remember the reaction she got when she inadvertently asked a man in knickerbockers if he had come to town on skis!

It is probably correct to describe Norway and Norwegians around 1950 as being considerably less urbane and sophisticated than they are today. The same could be said of the towns. As one observer commented: “Having come from a large British city, the streets seemed far too narrow; as if the houses were about to fall in on top of me.” Not only were the streets narrow, many people found them distinctly unattractive as well. Furthermore, the houses were just as cramped as the streets. The housing shortage was acute after five years of war and many found the situation to

be highly frustrating. The first Norwegian homes for some people were ex-German-officer barracks. In those days this was considered to be not the worst alternative accommodation!

Yet small things in everyday life could also give rise to amusing situations as well as irritations. Quite often the clearest indication of what peoples and nations have in common, as well as what separates them, is the food. Certain parts of Norwegian culinary tradition are, and will always be, peculiarly Norwegian and remain totally foreign to those used to other cultures and customs. Just as important in this connection is our conception of other peoples' culinary traditions – those that are on target and those which nearly hit the mark! All Norwegians know that tea is the British national drink (even though many rate beer as a worthy runner-up) yet they have scarcely heard of the brands in Britain's best-seller list. Even today, fallacies such as these can lead to misunderstandings – although perhaps less nowadays than when the barriers between the different cultures were greater. After all, it's not so many decades since paprika was a new and exotic vegetable and pizza was a foreign word!

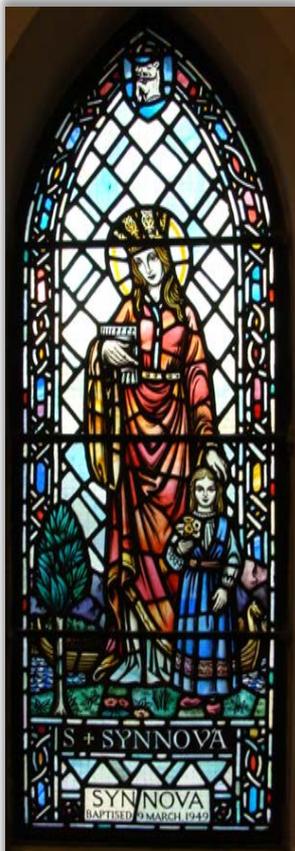
“Why do Norwegians insist on pouring cream into my teacup, when milk is the custom?” is a question many have asked. Just as typical, but perhaps more amusing, was the reaction of Norwegians when their palates first encountered Colman's mustard, and had to admit that it was in fact just as strong as they had been warned! Having said that, hefty discussions can still arise at St Edmund's about what constitutes a tasty sausage or a proper cheese. Other differences, real and imagined, have given rise to various stories that are remembered to this day. When a young English lady was about to move to Norway in the early 1950s, her boss was said to have issued a warning along the lines that “Those Norwegians are a pretty unhygienic lot!” Ironically, the impression gained by Norwegian seamen after the war was that this epithet better suited the British!

GROWTH AND REFORM

The above-mentioned cultural clashes, if they can even be called that, cannot overshadow the fact that the congregation was experiencing both growth and renewal, and records show that new forces were taking over. Of the congregation's 57 financial supporters in 1948, over half had joined after the war. A new generation was also on the way. Around 1950 the Sunday School could boast a membership of no less than sixty children; with two classes being held in the city's American School, and another at Grini to the west of Oslo. This high attendance could be attributed to the new Anglo-Norwegian family bonds formed during the war years.

The number of communicants doubled during this period, but this apparently came about principally because the Chaplain, Kenneth J Morgan, had introduced a monthly communion service with sermon. Mr Morgan expressly wished that dissenters and Anglo-Catholics should feel equally at home in the church. He was especially keen that St Edmund's





should be the spiritual home of Americans resident in Oslo. Once again it was the idea of the English language as binding agent, rather than credal direction, coming to the fore – in line with the thoughts and aspirations of the “founding fathers” from the middle of the 19th century.

We must not fail to mention that this was also the period when St Edmund’s, on the advice of the bishop, acquired its own “Parish Magazine.” One had to be on the alert for new ideas, as the bishop said about the Church in general. Another important milestone was the purchase of an official home for the resident chaplain. These two innovations had a uniting and strengthening function. The congregation gained a regular “headquarters” to supplement the church building, as well as a means of disseminating information apart from general notices about services and the informal jungle telegraph.

The creation of a parish magazine must also be viewed in the light of the post-war Anglican congregation not only experiencing substantial growth, but also having become geographically spread to a far greater extent than before. Sure enough, there had been groups of Britons in several Norwegian towns, but it was not until now that there emerged separate, what one could call “British societies,” and with them Anglican/English communities in towns beyond Oslo. In 1957, it could be announced at the Annual General Meeting of St Edmund’s: “Regular services have started in other parts of Norway.” This led irrevocably to an increased workload for the chaplain who, in actual fact, now had the whole country as his “parish.”

Improved public transport and communications made things easier but, as an anecdote from Bergen shows, they did not rely solely on the chaplain from Oslo in order to form a congregation. One Sunday when the chaplain missed the plane from Oslo, and the service had to be held in his absence without any preparation, the Bergen congregation’s self-reliance was put to the test. “If he had arrived we would probably not have concerned or exerted ourselves to the same extent. Neither would we have discovered what can be achieved through one’s own efforts, nor experienced the joy and usefulness of participating together in a spirit of fellowship.”

MEMORIES AND RECOLLECTIONS

On the subject of fellowship, we must also make mention of the various groups that all create lesser yet perhaps closer circles within the main fellowship, such as the choir, Sunday School and Bible study group. Originally built for people who often had roots outside of Norway, St Edmund’s Church encompasses two groups that deserve recognition as being quite distinctive, even though most congregations and churches have somewhat similar institutions.

The first is the Ladies Guild, an association whose roots date back as far as 1896, and which managed to collect the princely sum of 251 kroner

at its first bazaar. Numbers multiplied in the post-war period, due largely to the aforementioned addition of virtually a new generation. In fact the boom led to the formation of an additional and separate club, when a guild was established in Drammen.

1960 saw the formation of a new subsidiary in the greater parochial fellowship: The Young Adults Group. The group was formed primarily for the benefit of young men and women from Britain who were in Oslo for one or two years to study or work, often as au pairs, as well as young Anglophile Norwegians. Meetings were held in various private homes after Evensong on Sunday. In the summertime the religious and social aspects were often combined by taking trips to the islands of the Oslo Fjord, such as Hovedøya where they could visit the ruins of the first Edmund church. Commenting on one of these trips, the father-in-law of the then chaplain Bill Badham said it was the highlight of his visit to Oslo: "the unique service and the meal which followed was in fact reminiscent of another event which took place nearly two thousand years ago!"

On another occasion an evening trip to one of the islands almost ended in disaster when one of the fleet of small boats with three young adults on board was rammed and sunk by a speedboat piloted by two young boys who had taken their father's craft without his permission. Other nearby boats came quickly to their rescue – but the contents of the picnic hampers were irretrievably lost in the deep!

It is impossible to put into words what such associations and undertakings have meant for people coming from abroad to a new and very different country or, for that matter, what they mean even today. We often lay great stress on major cultural differences, but it is really the comfort of fellowship in everyday life that we most easily overlook. Some of these stories are already recounted, but not all of them belong to history. One English lady said, "Had it not been for the congregation in St Edmund's, I would never have been given sound advice on how to make my cake recipes work here in Norway!" The problem is that Norwegian flour, unlike its English counterpart, is not self-raising. Norwegian flour, therefore, needs baking powder. These are things we never think about, but they can lead to just as great a cultural clash as the language barrier.

Perhaps St Edmund's foremost external fund-raising activity is the pre-Christmas Bazaar which, since 1966, has been held in the assembly hall of the Swedish Margaretkyrkan, only a stone's throw from St Edmund's. As a curiosity we can mention that the Swedish crown princess after whom the church is named, was British born. This annual event, an innovation from the immediate post-war decade, was first arranged in 1954 at Håndverkeren, an assembly hall in Kristian Augusts gate. It was a financial success right from the start when the proceeds amounted to 18,000 Nkr. – a good deal of money in those days.





ROYAL CONNECTIONS

By performing the opening ceremony of the earliest Bazaars, Queen Maud's granddaughter Princess Astrid reaffirmed that the links between the English Church and Norwegian royalty, well established in Queen Maud's time, were still strong. King Olav V (reigned 1957-1991), like his mother, was a loyal supporter of the church throughout his lifetime. To most Norwegians, however, King Olav did not appear to be as "English" as his mother Queen Maud. But his British inheritance was latent in his nature, as illustrated by the following anecdote: One of Queen Maud's chambermaids who remained in Norway after the death of the Queen, pointed out that King Olav was a very pleasant and fine gentleman. "This was only to be expected – after all, he was half English!"

When asking people in general about their memories from the past, it is often the momentous and unusual events that are first recalled. One of the first major events in the post-war years was undoubtedly the State Visit of Queen Elizabeth in 1955, incidentally the first that she undertook. Her visit to St Edmund's on the same occasion was indeed a significant event. Viewed in retrospect, its significance is perhaps best exemplified by its being regarded as a great trial for the ladies of the choir who had to dress up in hat and gloves! Happily, the BBC reporter who covered the event could assure listeners that the choir's rendition was perfectly satisfactory.

DRESS CODE AND THE CHOIR

Whether the choir's fine voice was due to choir rehearsals in the early 1950s being held at Mrs Mooney's apartment we have no way of knowing. However, five floors up in a block of flats without a lift surely indicates extraordinary fitness and lung capacity! Incidentally, it was supposed to have been Mrs Mooney who, when referring to the good old days, coined the phrase: "In my day, chaplains were seen but not heard."

Formal attire and long stairways were however not the greatest problems for the choir. Finding someone who could conduct the music and mustering choristers for a Sunday service at any one time were major challenges. Choir membership in the 1960s seemed to be proportional to the number that could be recruited from the NATO headquarters at Kolsås. During the course of one year, the number of choristers could sink from 29 to 12. But as we know, St Edmund's is a small building and the choir did not have much room on a Sunday. It must undoubtedly have felt very cramped in bygone days when the British Consul and his wife, attending the service, had the soprano bench reserved solely for themselves. They insisted on sitting beneath the Royal Coat of Arms which hung above the soprano bench before it was removed to its present position at the back of the church.

We do not know whether it was due to lack of space but, as one might reasonably expect over a period of 100 years, the choir has not always followed the baton of the organist and choirmaster. Once, when the Lord's



HM Queen Elizabeth II

Prayer was to be sung to an appointed chant, the result was so disastrous that choirmaster John Carroll exclaimed, audible to all the congregation: "If you can't sing it, then for goodness sake say it!" Neither did all the pigeons roosting in the steeple sing completely in tune. Choir members have pointed out that they could often hear an unmistakable cooing from the pigeons in the tower who accompanied both the hymns and the sermon prior to the latest major refurbishment in the early 1990s (see below).

It has been said that the advantage of cassocks and robes is that one doesn't have to worry too much about what is beneath. Yet is that really true? It is said that disapproval was shown with a new chaplain's choice of footwear: "Doc Martin boots. We can't have an incumbent with that!" On the same subject, it has been questioned whether tennis socks are a suitable part of a pastor's daily attire! Naturally, none of these comments are to be taken seriously. Yet such questions go to show that all people at times have had, and still have, stereotype preconceptions of what is "suitable" or "unsuitable."



ACCESSIBILITY AND EXPANSION

The poor transport facilities in former times have been mentioned in several contexts; just as improvements have led to better accessibility to St Edmund's. But what does one do when the system fails to operate as it should? This was a highly relevant question for a confirmation retinue in the 1960s. When the ferry from Nesodden unexpectedly breaks down, and one is due to attend one's own confirmation, swimming across the Oslo Fjord is a poor alternative. The church had a telephone in those days so that a message could be given, but confirmation via the telephone was not an option! When the retinue eventually arrived, naturally rather stressed, the bishop was in the middle of the liturgy. The admonition from the chaplain's wife was spontaneous and unequivocal: "Get up there and get yourself confirmed!" An embarrassing situation was thus resolved clearly and simply – perhaps a perfect example of the famous English imperturbability.

As we have pointed out elsewhere in this chapter, the Post-war Era was a time of expansion for St Edmund's. Expansion is a two-edged sword: More people mean that something gets bigger, but it can also mean less room. St Edmund's Church has often been described as a church with very small dimensions. It is therefore something of a paradox that while we are celebrating a milestone anniversary, the congregation's main aim for over sixty years was to actively seek to replace the church with a new one. As recently as 1969, it was stressed on behalf of the incumbent that "unless one was not utterly convinced that the present church would have to be used in the foreseeable future, one should not spend large sums of money on maintenance and suchlike." As we know, a new church never did materialise, even though there is no such thing as "never" or "the last time" in history.



THE CRYPT

If the church was too small, it was even more important to utilise every available space – in this case, the basement area that is now known as “the Crypt.” Several alternative means of obtaining more space had been suggested and discussed since the middle of the 1950s. Extending the church southwards, or purchasing adjoining property, are examples of expansion that were never realised. The actual conversion of the crypt, or more rightly the minuscule basement comprising a few square metres, also took several years. The deciding factor for starting work on the cellar was the need for somewhere to have a Sunday School during the Sunday morning service. In a manner of speaking, the Sunday School and our children are the real owners of today’s crypt.

Throughout the years these premises have been subjected to extension and renovation, and this has not always been without complications. Some voluntary workers have struggled with obstinate paint that has refused to adhere properly, while others have grappled with recalcitrant brickwork that has partially collapsed! The suggestion to dedicate the wall in question with a plaque: “Leif’s Odd Corner,” was somehow never realised. The last major refurbishment of the church was during the period August to November 1993, when virtually all the church interior, including the pews, choir stalls and the litany desk, was stripped out. It must have been a strange sight to see the incumbent’s oak desk and kneeler, complete with carved angels, being launched out onto the ice-covered pavement with the churchwarden on board, as a kind of ecclesiastical sledge!



The Sunday School prepares for the traditional Christingle service.

INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS

This theme has been repeated many times: From its earliest days, and even before realisation, St Edmund's has been a congregation with the English language as the connecting link, rather than adherence to a strict theological and credal conformity. If there is one thing that characterises the universal church throughout the twentieth century it is precisely this co-operational and ecumenical aspect – the rapprochement of the various church denominations. From the very beginning, St Edmund's has received invaluable support from the Norwegian church, which was represented at the laying of the foundation stone as well as at the inauguration.

The inter-war years saw the beginning of a truly significant ecumenical commitment among the Protestant church communities; efforts that have intensified during the past fifty years. During his visits to Oslo in 1950 and 1953 an Anglican Bishop emphasised the need to continue reinforcing Anglo-Norwegian co-operation as well as the ecumenical links. In the 1950s a number of meetings were held in Oslo between representatives of the Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox church denominations (where St Edmund's strangely enough was not represented). On the other hand, practical co-operation had been formed with the American Lutheran Church in Oslo and with the Roman Catholic St Olav's Church. Once again, mention must be made of the Swedish Church that placed, and still places, their premises at our disposal for the annual Bazaar, and for Sunday worship during periods of renovation.

THE PORVOO AGREEMENT

The most symbolic expression of the wish for a closer co-operation and more intimate Christian fellowship was undoubtedly the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Oslo in 1971, in connection with the 900-years anniversary of the inauguration of the city as a cathedral town. Presenting a chalice to Bishop Fridtjov Birkeli, Archbishop Arthur Michael Ramsey expressed the wish that the two churches would soon have a sacramental fellowship. This wish became a reality in 1996 with the signing of the so-called Porvoo Agreement, named after the Finnish town of Porvoo/Borgå. This agreement is principally an Anglican -Lutheran fellowship between several churches in Europe, with full mutual recognition of each other's Baptism, Communion and Clergy. As a result of this agreement, a great many barriers and obstacles have been removed. One of the most important consequences for St Edmund's and the rest of the Anglican Chaplaincy in Norway is that clergy from the Church of Norway can take Anglican services of worship.



Centrepiece (18cm x 10cm) of the window in the vestry, given to Valde farm in Gudbrandsdalen by one of the survivors of the 1612 Scottish campaign, "Sinclairtoget." Donated to St Edmund's by Thomas Michell in 1885.



*From left:
Canon Revd Janet Heil,
Revd Sammy Masemola,
Bishop David Hamid*

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In historian circles one often talks about finding the essence of history – generally referred to as history’s *leitmotif*. Regarding St Edmund’s, such a main theme could best be described as Christian fellowship shared by nations having one common language. Right from the start, it was a declared intention that St Edmund’s should not only be an Anglican Church for ex-patriot Britons (as indeed it was and still is) but just as much a church for all English-speaking people – and without English necessarily being the mother tongue. Today this latter feature is perhaps more apparent than ever before. In a world of improved communications and increased globalisation, St Edmund’s has become a meeting place for people from more than a dozen different countries – people with different stories to tell about why they come to St Edmund’s – but who are united by a common faith and language.

As in society at large, St Edmund’s throughout its 125-years existence has lived through many epochs. In retrospect we have characterised and named them according to how they are remembered. Indeed, the church can to a certain extent be seen as a mirror of Norway’s social development. Growth was replaced by the stagnation and high cost of living of the inter-war period. The Second World War meant that all activities had to be carried out in secret. The post-war era led to renewed growth and change. In recent years the global perspective has entered the equation so that today’s congregation comprises members from all five continents.

The development that has taken place can also be viewed in a more ecclesiastical perspective. From having started as virtually a family business, initiated by a small group of British ex-patriots and diplomats, it has become a formal Anglican Chaplaincy within the Diocese of Europe under the auspices of the Church of England. However, its location outside the British Isles has given St Edmund’s its own identity. It is not only an “English Church” in Norway but a very special church and congregation which constantly changes as people come and go. This brings us back to pre-1884 times, before the formation of a separate church and a formal organisation. In this light, the church’s history and the church of today can be seen as living proof that a church is not solely a building of bricks and mortar, but primarily the people within it.

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Donations to The Anglican Chaplaincy may be made via
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